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Background Paper #2 – Goals, Benchmarks, and Performance Measures

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Washington State Scenic and Recreational Highways Plan

Highways and Local Programs Division



**Washington State
Department of Transportation**

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Introduction

Overview

This report examines the current performance measures and benchmarks relating to Scenic and Recreational Highways in Washington State. It summarizes these current measures and recommends possible future additions and changes. As the Plan is developed, additional data sources may be discovered and new analysis may be added to this Background Paper.

Performance measurement is a priority for the Governor and Washington State Department of Transportation. The Scenic and Recreational Highways are part of the state transportation system and all associated programs and efforts must be consistent with the policy goals described in state law (RCW 47.04.280):

- (a) Preservation: To maintain, preserve, and extend the life and utility of prior investments in transportation systems and services;
- (b) Safety: To provide for and improve the safety and security of transportation customers and the transportation system;
- (c) Mobility: To improve the predictable movement of goods and people throughout Washington State;
- (d) Environment: To enhance Washington's quality of life through transportation investments that promote energy conservation, enhance healthy communities, and protect the environment; and
- (e) Stewardship: To continuously improve the quality, effectiveness, and efficiency of the transportation system.

These policy goals are the basis for establishing detailed and measurable objectives and related performance measures.

Additionally, *Washington's Transportation Plan* calls for performance measures:

“Improved accountability is essential. Local, regional, and state transportation providers must base infrastructure investments on performance measurement and performance-based decision making to ensure the right projects are delivered when needed, and to maintain the public’s confidence in government’s ability to meet their needs.”

Regular monitoring and evaluation of these performance measures helps ensure that Scenic and Recreational Highways are better integrated into daily state agency

operations. Benchmarking and performance measures also help document improvements throughout the state, providing data that can be used to describe progress toward the goals to the legislature and the general public.

The following information is discussed in detail in this Background Paper:

- Characteristics of good, state-level performance measures;
- Status of existing performance measures used in different states;
- Existing scenic and recreational system data and information; and
- Proposed performance measures for Washington's Scenic and Recreational Highway System.

Purpose of Goals, Benchmarks, and Performance Measures

The overall objective of setting goals and collecting and evaluating data is to gauge continued progress toward increasing stewardship, increasing tourism and traveler services, planning, and integration for Washington's Scenic and Recreational Highways.

The recommended performance measures are an expansion of an existing process, to better enable Washington State to evaluate progress toward goals and objectives. As new performance measures are initiated, they should be regularly evaluated to determine if the measures are effective, or if modifications are needed. Regular evaluation of the performance measures should be based on the following questions:

- Are the findings from each performance measure useful for evaluating the states goals and objectives for the state's Scenic and Recreational Highway System?
- Are performance measures capturing outcomes, outputs, or both?
- Are the resources required to collect the data for each performance measure reasonable, given the amount of information that they yield?
- Is the data for each performance measure reliable?

There may also be opportunities to improve the performance measures in the future using new local, state, and national data. Changes to the census and other national, regional, and local transportation surveys have the potential to increase the amount and quality of available information. This may change data collection significantly in the future, and would also necessitate periodic reevaluation of Washington's performance measures.

Goals, Benchmarks, and Performance Measures in Other States

This Report includes a discussion of related performance measures in several other states. Building on previous work by FHWA, we also find that many states do not currently measure performance for scenic highways or scenic byway systems. In most states, the

available data on use and facilities do not exist or have significant limitations, such as small sample sizes and inconsistencies in the way the data is collected and recorded.

This situation is changing as more states begin to recognize the importance of corridor management planning. In recent years, several states including Florida and New York have established transportation goals and performance measures related to corridor planning. The performance measures in these states address different aspects including administration, economic impacts, and program focus areas.

Based on a review of the existing status of performance measures we have developed a list of characteristics of good state-level performance measures. Good performance measures for Washington State's Scenic and Recreational Highways should:

- Help the state determine its progress toward meeting state goals;
- Be easily measured and graphed over time;
- Use appropriate, easily understood language;
- Infer the data that need to be collected;
- Use data that is readily available or can be collected cost- and labor-effectively on a one-to-three year cycle;
- Be reported at regular intervals, such as in an annual or biannual performance measures report;
- Serve as a benchmarking tool to measure how well practices match with stated policies or are working toward stated goals;
- Consider the opinions of the end user as one source of information (e.g., gather the opinions of travelers); and
- Relate to outcomes (though there are often factors beyond government control that also influence the measured outcomes).

When establishing performance measures, we also recognize the importance of:

- Ensuring the measures do not require a significant amount of additional resources be spent on data collection;
- Coordinating among agencies to determine what data are available and obtain accurate and meaningful data;
- Understanding the quality and validity of the data used in the proposed performance measures;
- Balance the need for data that are easy to collect and data that are meaningful for evaluating performance;
- Incorporate performance measures that are process-oriented (measure the direct implementation of policies and actions of the agency), as well as those that are outcome-oriented (measure the end results of policies and actions in relation to scenic highway use, safety, stewardship, economic benefits, etc.), even if it may be more difficult to obtain data for the outcome-oriented measures; and
- Understand and explain, as needed, other state, regional, and local influences on outcome-based performance measures, such as land use decisions, cultural attitudes, and socioeconomic trends.

Existing Goals, Benchmarks, and Performance Measures

Goals and performance measures related to Scenic and Recreational Highways can be found for a number of state and federal programs within several agencies including:

- National Park Service,
- Department of Commerce,
- Department of Natural Resources,
- Department of Transportation,
- State Parks, and
- Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation.

Each of these agencies plays a complimentary role in supporting Scenic and Recreational Highways in areas including tourism/traveler services, stewardship, and planning.

The goals and performance measures that are consistent with the three primary elements of Scenic and Recreational Highways, tourism/traveler services, stewardship, and planning and integration, have been identified with an “*” below.

Local and Regional Corridor Management Plans

As part of the development of this report, the project team conducted a review of existing corridor management plans produced by local byway groups, WSDOT, Parks and others.

Appendix A of this report contains the review of corridor management plans in Washington. The review found that these local and regional plans, their measurable goals, and their project level priorities are critical and serve as the foundation that will allow Washington to establish a realistic and measureable goal(s) for the State’s Scenic and Recreational Highway System. Many of the corridor management plans establish aggressive goals. Some identify specific agencies and organizations responsible for implementing objectives or strategies. Few contain performance measures for the goals they establish or call for progress reporting.

National Park Service – Natural Resource Stewardship

The National Park Services initiated the Natural Resource Stewardship program in 2003 to help monitor and preserve natural resources and wildlife habitat within the National Park System. The National Park Service (NPS) directly manages these resources through a variety of means that range from maintaining basic inventories to full-scale restoration of disturbed park lands and ecosystems. Several of the performance measures they assess include:

Outcome measures:

- Acres of disturbed park lands prepared for natural restoration per year*
- Percent of parks containing ecosystems in good or fair condition*
- Percent of disturbed parklands acres that are being restored*

Output measures:

- Percent of parks that have identified their vital signs for natural resource monitoring*
- Percent of completed data sets of natural resource inventories*

Efficiency Measures:

- Average cost of treating an acre of park land disturbed with exotic plants

Washington State Parks

The Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission acquires, operates, enhances, and protects a diverse system of recreational, cultural, historical, and natural sites. The Commission fosters outdoor recreation and education statewide to provide enjoyment and enrichment for all, and a valued legacy to future generations. To these ends, Washington State Parks has established a series of performance measures including:

Process Measures:

- Staffing costs vs. project costs

Output Measures:

- Winter trail miles built *
- Winter trail miles groomed *
- Planned maintenance projects completed *
- Boating safety classes offered *
- Deferred maintenance projects completed *
- Land transactions *
- Road maintenance projects completed *
- Park Ranger contacts
- Volunteer hours

Outcome Measures:

- Annual attendance *
- Customer satisfaction *
- Boating Safety - reported accidents
- Total park revenue *
- Weekend camping occupancy rate *
- Interpretive program attendance *

Washington State Department of Commerce

Washington State Tourism Commission

In 2007, Washington State Tourism Commission was charged with the development of a Strategic Plan to meet state planning and performance requirements. This comprehensive six-year strategy for Washington State Tourism represents the interest and participation of over 500 Washington tourism industry leaders and practitioners. The Strategic Plan includes a mission statement, four strategic goals, and a series of objectives and measures.

The mission is to competitively market Washington as a premier travel destination, providing job growth, tax revenue, sustained economic prosperity, and quality of life for residents and businesses. Four strategic goals build on this mission statement and recognize the broad roles the Commission and Washington State Department of Commerce must play to effectively compete in the visitor marketplace.

Washington State Department of Commerce continues to track progress implementing their agency Strategic Plan. Some performance measures related to tourism include:

Performance Measures:

- The percentage of consumers aware of Washington's brand*
- The return on investment for tourism marketing expenditures*
- The amount of tourism spending by county*
- The number of airport arrivals from out-of-state (when available).

Washington's Growth Management Services

The State's Growth Management Services, within the Department of Commerce, assists and guides local governments, state agencies, and others in planning and achieving effective solutions to manage growth and development, consistent with the Growth Management Act. They provide technical and financial resources to help local governments develop county-wide planning policies, comprehensive plans, and development regulations, including critical areas ordinances. One primary goal and performance measure for Growth Management Services, as reported by Office of Financial management, includes:

Goal:

- Coordinate government efforts to improve the effectiveness of economic investments*

Performance Measure:

- Percentage of development occurring within urban areas of the six most populated counties*

Washington's Main Street Program

Washington's Main Street Program is one of several statewide programs within Washington State Department of Commerce. The Main Street Program provides technical assistance to communities to retain, expand, and attract businesses through implementation of the National Main Street model. To achieve investment and job creation in Washington, this specialized program may provide consultative services, develop public and private financial partnership options, develop business information packages, and conduct site visits to Washington communities. One primary goal and performance measure for Washington's Main Street Program, as reported by Office of Financial management, includes:

Goal:

- Provide seed and growth capital and support entrepreneurs

Performance Measure:

- Number of jobs created/retained and capital investment and state tax revenue generated*

Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP)

The Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP) is the sole agency responsible for the administration of the national historic preservation program. The program requires managing the National Register of Historic Places and the federal rehabilitation tax credit program, administering grants to federally designated local historic preservation commissions, functioning as the central repository for all cultural resource data, developing a state historic preservation plan and conducting regulatory reviews under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. Under state law the agency is responsible for ensuring the protection of archaeological sites, administering the Washington Heritage Register and Washington Heritage Barn Register, and managing two grant programs; one for historic barns and another for historic courthouses. Similar to WSDOT, six statewide planning goals help DAHP to meet state and federal planning and performance requirements.

Planning Goals:

- Increase use of historic preservation as an economic development and community revitalization tool*
- Advocate to protect our heritage*
- Strengthen connections inside and outside the preservation community*
- Integrate preservation principles into local land use designations, regulations, and development processes*
- Expand efforts to identify and preserve cultural and historic resources*
- Effectively increase knowledge of historic preservation and its importance to Washington*

Performance Measures:

- Number of properties listed in the National and Washington Heritage Registers*
- Number of properties listed in the archaeological and historic site databases*
- Private investment in historic rehabilitation*
- Percentage of federal project reviews completed within the statutory 30-day deadline
- Percentage of state archaeology permit reviews completed with the statutory 60-day deadline
- Percentage of transportation project reviews completed within the statutory 30-day deadline*
- Permit compliance or the number of permit violations
- The number of local project reviews, i.e. SEPA and SMA reviews

Columbia River Gorge Commission

All counties of the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area administer land use policies set forth by the Gorge Commission, with the exception of Klickitat County. (The Commission implements these policies for Klickitat County.) The Commission reviews county-approved plans for development to ensure consistency with the National Scenic Area Act and Management Plan and disperses grant funding to Clark and Skamania counties to provide planning and permitting services required by the Management Plan. It also reviews federal monies dispensed by Oregon and Washington investment.

Goals:

- Implementation of the Management Plan and National Scenic Area Act*
- Develop a cohesive set of land use ordinances for the National Scenic Area*

Performance Measures:

- Percentage of county development decisions that are reviewed during the land use permitting process by Columbia River Gorge Commission staff*
- Number of presentations to civic and community groups each year*
- Number of appeals resolved by alternative dispute resolution methods*

Washington State Department of Natural Resources

Natural Heritage Program

This program maintains information on Washington's native plant and animal species and ecosystems. It maintains a listing of the most imperiled and rare native species and ecosystem types and assigns conservation priorities to each species and ecosystem. It also supports informed decisions by natural resource managers, planners, and businesses and consults on the impact of land use and land management activities on the state's plants, animals, and natural communities.

Goal:

- Provide good science and natural resource monitoring data to support decision-making*

Performance Measure:

- Number of Natural Heritage digital data requests responded to within 30 days of the receipt of the request

Recreation Program

This program provides access opportunities and support facilities to the public for both non-motorized and motorized recreation. It operates and maintains 143 recreational sites and more than 1,000 miles of trails across the state. Department of Natural Resources (DNR), through this program, competes for grant funding to successfully accomplish site and trail maintenance, restoration, and enhancement projects. Volunteers are involved in recreation planning and on-the-ground site and trail maintenance work.

Goal:

- Ensure access to cultural and recreational opportunities*

Performance Measure:

- Dollar value of volunteer time and private dollars donated to maintain 143 recreation sites statewide*

State Lands Management Program

This program protects and enhances the asset values of trust and conservation lands through strategic property transactions. Using land sales, purchases, transfers, and exchanges to attain desired trust land base and land uses, the program improves the financial performance of trust assets while achieving environmental and social goals. Through state and federal grant programs, including the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program, Forest Legacy, Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund, and the Riparian Easement programs, this program implements department goals by protecting ecologically significant lands and working forests threatened by conversion. This enables DNR to establish a statewide system of natural areas, meeting the goals of DNR's Habitat Conservation Plan, and maintaining working landscapes and our state's rural character.

Goal:

- Achieve sustainable use of public natural resources*

Performance Measures:

- Number of acres of land transferred for conservation and recreation purposes through Trust Land Transfer, Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program and other conservation programs*
- Number of acres protected as working farms and forests, conservation lands, park lands, and open space through purchases, sales, transfers, and exchanges*

Washington State Department of Transportation

In 2005, a legislatively-created transportation audit board reviewed transportation statutes, benchmarks, and other investment criteria with the goal of simplifying WSDOT's numerous investment instructions and reporting requirements. These included nine Statewide Transportation Benchmarks, the Governor's Priorities of Government-based budgeting, Performance Auditing, Government Management Accountability Program (GMAP) reporting, and legislatively mandated capital investment criteria.

The 2005 study recommended a model based on the State of Maryland, which requires a 20-year plan based on goals and objectives that are linked to an annual consolidated transportation plan. The annual plan includes a six-year listing of programs and projects, and an annual report on the attainment of transportation goals and benchmarks.

Transportation Policy Goals

The 2007 Legislature implemented the study's recommendations, and repealed the existing nine transportation benchmarks and established five policy goals that did not

codify specific benchmarks and performance measures. The state's policy goals for the planning, operation, performance of, and investment in, the state's transportation system are as follow:

Preservation: to maintain, preserve, and extend the life and utility of prior investments in transportation systems and services; *

Safety: to provide for and improve the safety and security of transportation customers and the transportation system; *

Mobility: to improve the predictable movement of goods and people throughout Washington State; *

Environment: to enhance Washington's quality of life through transportation investments that promote energy conservation, enhance healthy communities, and protect the environment; and *

Stewardship: to continually improve the quality, effectiveness, and efficiency of the transportation system. *

Examples from Other States

While at least 39 states (See **Appendix B** of this report for a list) have developed some administration processes for scenic highways or byways, the lack of performance measures is a consistent challenge. The performance measures that do exist are often not routinely measured.

A study conducted for the Transportation Research Board summarizes the issue:

“A common belief of all states was that a scenic byways program would provide economic benefits through increased tourism as well as protect the critical scenic, cultural, and historical resources of the state. Perhaps these beliefs are justifiable, but most states have not followed through with the necessary statistical data to prove their assumptions.”
(TRB, Paper No. 971343)

While there are some data showing the connection between increased tourism and visitor spending on scenic byways or scenic highways, the clear linkage between investment through the Scenic Byway Grant Program or state spending through other similar state programs, has not been demonstrated. Some examples of the data showing increased tourism and visitor spending includes:

The Blue Ridge Parkway, NC: Visitors spent \$1.8 billion in counties adjacent to the Blue Ridge Parkway, according to a 1995-96 study. These expenditures resulted in over \$147 million in tax revenues and supported more than 74,614 jobs in the region.¹

Vermont Scenic Byways: Travelers from out of state who drove Vermont Scenic Byways for the scenic drive or sightseeing spent 25 percent more per day than those traveling for other reasons.²

Colorado Scenic Byways: A survey of tourism-related businesses along two scenic byways in Colorado showed that a majority of business owners estimated a 10 percent increase in sales due to byway designation.³

Data about public awareness can be, and has in some cases been, measured through public surveys or polls. However, performance measures of improvements/increases due to federal and state spending on byways or scenic highways in the areas of tourism, stewardship, and planning can be difficult to establish because they require data that may not currently exist and other variables including population growth, traffic growth, road improvements or alternations, and tourism related influences are difficult to control for in program or corridor evaluation. Some of the most common data available to states are census data and household travel survey data. Both of these sources have limitations. The census does not include tourism or recreational trips and the National Household Travel Survey has limited information in this area.

In order to prepare this document, the efforts of several states that have evaluated performance of scenic byways or scenic highways were reviewed. This review included Arizona, Colorado, Florida, North Carolina, Iowa, Oregon, and New York states. Several general observations can be made about the performance measure discussions in these states to date:

- All states reviewed expressed goals involving expanded economic growth to result from byway designation.
- Few states evaluated or discussed performance related to planning or stewardship efforts on scenic and recreational highways.
- While some connection to public awareness has been made, no direct linkages or statistical relationships have been established between spending through federal or state programs related to scenic byways or scenic and recreational highways and desired outcomes.

¹ *1995-96 Economic Impact of Travel to the Blue Ridge Parkway, Virginia and North Carolina.* (1997). By Gene Brothers and Rachel Chen, North Carolina State University.

² *An Analysis of the Economic Impacts of Scenic Byway Treatments in Vermont: A Pilot Study.* (1996). Impact Research Associates, Inc.

³ *Interim Report on Colorado Scenic and Historic Byways, Economic Impact Study.* (TRB Paper No. 970276).

Establishing the Best State Performance Measures

Based on the review of performance measures from several states, the best performance measures:

- Provide a description of the data that need to be collected;
- Use data that can be collected cost-effectively;
- Are quantifiable and time-constrained (e.g., number of traveler information signs maintained);
- Can be reported at regular intervals, such as an annual performance measures report; and
- Serve as a benchmarking tool to measure how well the agency's practices match with its stated policies in all three areas including traveler services/tourism, planning and integration, and stewardship.

Proposed Goals, Benchmarks, and Performance Measures

Goals

After conducting a review of federal programs, as well as existing state, local and regional plans and programs within Washington and other states, some common goals have emerged. Local Byway Corridor Management Plans, regional agencies like the Columbia River Gorge Commission, FHWA, the Governor's Climate Challenge, State Transportation Policy Goals, the State Tourism Commission's Strategic Plan all establish specific measures in pursuit some shared goals for Scenic and Recreational Highways:

- **Stewardship** – protecting, preserving, enhancing resources
- **Tourism/Traveler Services** – increasing and enhancing traveler experience and access
- **Planning** – developing and implementing management plans
- **Integration** – coordination with other agencies and organizations

Washington should consider supporting these goals for the State's Scenic and Recreational Highways because of their comprehensive nature and pre-existing support at many levels of government. These simple statewide goals also meet the recommended criteria for best practice in performance measurement outlined within this report. Possibly most importantly, this goal is consistent with the Transportation Policy Goals established by the 2007 State Legislature (RCW 47.04.280). The goals should be refined however to establish a timeframe within which to accomplish the goal; 20 to 25 years is suggested as the maximum time allotted to achieving these goals.

Performance Measures, Benchmarks, and Implementation Strategies

In addition to establishing overarching goals for Scenic and Recreational Highways, a comprehensive list of existing and proposed benchmarks and performance measures have been identified to help Washington meet these goals. These existing and proposed benchmarks and performance measures are grouped into two primary categories, based on the state's six transportation policy goals. Each of these areas is recognized as equally important in order to move toward the overarching goals.

State Transportation Safety and Mobility Objectives	
Safety and Mobility Objective:	<i>Increase traveler safety, traveler services, and public access to support tourism on Washington's Scenic and Recreational Highways.</i>
WSDOT Implementation Steps:	I. WSDOT and other state agency plans, policies, and standards will recognize bicycling and walking as viable modes of transportation and as being supportive of tourism and economic development in Washington.
	II. Scenic and recreational highways will be considered in all WSDOT transportation plans and corridor studies; from the project level to the programmatic level.
	III. WSDOT will work with local agencies, transit providers, and developers to identify additional funding for projects not yet in design or construction to ensure development of the entire project including elements associated with scenic and recreational highways.
	IV. WSDOT will implement a project development process, specifically scoping guidance for scenic and recreational highways as well as roadway improvement and bridge replacement projects, to include routine consideration of associated needs.
	V. WSDOT will continue to partner with state agency representatives, organizations and local byway groups, that play a role in supporting the scenic and recreational highway system.
Performance Measures:	Elimination of known risk locations/factors in the vicinity of important tourism destination points.
	Number of traveler information signs maintained.
	Number of visitor centers and rest areas on scenic and recreational highways.
	Miles of accessible trails associated with scenic and recreational highways.
	Number of park or public recreation area access points improved.
	Number of viewpoints on scenic and recreational highways.



State Transportation Health and Environment Objective	
Health and Environment Objective:	<i>Plan for, protect, preserve, and enhance natural, cultural, and historic resources associated with the State's Scenic and Recreational Highways.</i>
WSDOT Implementation Steps:	I. During the local agency public comment period, WSDOT will review and provide comment when needed on local land use decisions associated with scenic and recreational highways.
	II. WSDOT will pursue natural resource protection partnerships for areas associated with scenic and recreational highways.
	III. WSDOT will coordinate with local agencies and organizations developing climate adaptation plans associated with scenic and recreational highways.
Performance Measures:	Number of acres of land along scenic and recreational highways transferred for conservation and recreation purposes through various conservation programs.
	Number of acres of land along scenic and recreational highways protected as working farms and forests, conservation lands, park lands, and open space through purchases, sales, transfers, and exchanges.
	Number of local byway corridor management plans recognized through other planning processes at the local, regional, and/or state level.
	Fish barrier removal associated with scenic and recreational highways
	Water quality improvement efforts, habitat restoration, or other environmental mitigation efforts in the vicinity of scenic and recreational highways.
	Number of significant stewardship sites protected or enhanced.
	Percentage of county development decisions that are reviewed by WSDOT during the land use permitting process.



Timeframes, Targets, and Implementation

Each of the recommended performance measures should have performance targets established. In some cases, baseline data may still be needed to establish specific performance targets. After the baseline data are collected, five-year performance targets should be set for the remaining measures. Collecting this additional data will take the collaborative effort of several state agencies, as well as regional and local participation.

Note that the targets that are established do not necessarily need to show an increase or decrease. For example, a target could be set to maintain a certain percentage at a constant level of quality.

Like other states, Washington is limited by the lack of data that is available. However, there are currently efforts to improve these data sources. Proposals include:

- Collecting existing data on, counting and/or estimating recreational trips
- Developing a “Stewardship Index” to determine priority areas of the state scenic and recreational highway system
- Compiling inventory data for signs, rest areas, pull-outs and all other traveler services infrastructure to determine maintenance need.
- Reviewing all related projects funded through state and federal programs.